



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1406 Longworth House Office Building • Washington, D.C. 20515 • (202) 225-5506

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Contact: Stephanie Lundberg
Phone: 202-225-5506

Kind Pushes Proposals to Crack Down on Ethics Abuses & Restore Trust in Government

Comprehensive Reform to Revise, Enforce, and Honor Rules

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) today addressed the need to reform the Congressional ethics process and outlined his ideas to restore trust and accountability in the way government conducts itself. Kind presented his Honest Government Initiative which includes a number of proposals to crack down on ethics abuses and preserve the integrity of government by improving the enforcement of existing law, requiring more stringent lobbying disclosure, and enhancing ethics oversight. Kind will bring his ideas to Washington this week when Democrats of both chambers meet to work on their Honest Leadership and Open Government agenda.

“It is long past time to address the systemic problems that have undermined the American people’s confidence in Congress,” stated Kind. “Honest reform to restore honesty in government should involve both a tightening of rules as well as a commitment to uphold and enforce the laws we already have on the books.”

Rep. Kind is an original cosponsor of the Special Interest Lobbying and Ethics Accountability Act (H.R. 2412) introduced in the spring of 2005. The bill would enhance lobbying disclosure, curb excesses in privately funded travel, and slow the revolving door between government and lobbying jobs.

Kind believes part of the problem is the impotence of the House Ethics Committee, which he says could do a better job of enforcing the rules already in place. Recent rule changes have weakened the committee’s ability to act on ethics complaints made against lawmakers, including a rule which lets a complaint die if the committee cannot decide whether it should be investigated within 45 days. One of Kind’s proposals would automatically refer ethics cases to a special prosecutor if the committee becomes deadlocked.

“It is simply not enough for Congress to have a code of conduct; we must uphold that code by enforcing the rules and holding violators accountable,” stated Kind. “We have rules and a system to investigate questionable ethics in the House, but that system is broken and as a result ethics abuses have gone unchecked.”

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Kind examples the corruption case involving Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who earlier this month pleaded guilty to felony charges of conspiracy that involved bribing lawmakers with campaign contributions and lavish gifts, as proof that the system is broken. As part of his plea, Mr. Abramoff agreed to testify in a corruption investigation that will probe Members of Congress and staff with links to Mr. Abramoff. It has been reported that Mr. Abramoff's ties to the Republican Party stretch into the executive branch, and he could implicate up to 12 members of Congress [New York Times, Jan. 10 2006].

“The House Ethics Committee must get to work to investigate breaches of ethics and corruption cases, including those involving Members with ties to Mr. Abramoff,” stated Kind. “Bribing government officials and “pay for play” politics have no place in the Congress or the White House.”

Rep. Kind’s Honest Government Initiative as well as background information highlighting Democrats’ actions to clean up Congress are available on Kind's Web site: <http://www.house.gov/kind/>. House Democrats will unveil their comprehensive Honest Leadership and Open Government agenda on January 18, 2006.